

ASSOCIATED PRESS
17 February 1987

GATES FACES TOUGH QUESTIONING AT CONFIRMATION OVER IRAN-CONTRA AFFAIR
BY JIM DRINKARD

A WASHINGTON (AP) — Acting CIA Director Robert M. Gates, facing sharp questioning today about the Iran-Contra affair in Senate confirmation hearings, testified last April that CIA employees believe in the congressional oversight process.

He said nearly two-thirds of the agency's employees had been hired since Congress tightened controls on U.S. intelligence a decade ago and "they know no other way of doing business than within the framework of congressional oversight."

But Gates and other top agency officials failed to tell Congress of the CIA role in the secret arms deal with Tehran, or their suspicions that some of the proceeds went to help Nicaragua's Contra rebels.

Senators on the Select Intelligence Committee say they will ask Gates today to explain the CIA role in the Iran-Contra affair, and to renew his pledge to cooperate with congressional oversight panels.

Gates, a 43-year-old career CIA analyst, was nominated this month to replace William J. Casey as director of central intelligence. Casey, 73, retired after the removal of a cancerous tumor from his brain.

Gates, who would become the youngest person ever to head the CIA, has tried to create an appearance of openness to Congress that sharply contrasts with Casey.

Gates was easily confirmed to the No. 2 CIA post last April on a 10-0 vote by the Senate committee, but is expected to face tougher questioning today from the same panel.

P Sen. David Boren, D-Okla., the Intelligence Committee's new chairman, said that in order to assure the committee enough time to "reflect upon all relevant information," he wants no vote until the expiration of the full 14-day waiting period provided by the panel's rules.

Boren said the Iran-Contra affair showed a failure by the Reagan administration to follow the oversight rules, and called for a fresh start.

"I think the most important thing is attitude," Boren said in an interview. "We are going to show them that we're worthy of trust ... and we expect them to be totally candid with us."

Gates, who began his career in the 1960s as an Air Force intelligence officer with a Minuteman missile wing, told senators in April that critics are mistaken when they say the CIA "deeply dislikes oversight, resists keeping the committees informed, carries out its reporting responsibilities grudgingly and minimally and would like to return to the so-called good old days before oversight."

P Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., former vice chairman of the panel, said, "Gates was quite forthcoming when I dealt with him, but I believe the committee will want to delve deeply into what he knew about the entire Iran-Contra affair."

Gates should be closely questioned on the CIA role in the Iran-Contra affair, Leahy said, telling reporters, "I don't think you'll ever see Casey talking again about it."

Continued

2

) Leahy said ``there are a lot of questions to be asked in this affair about just what the CIA knew and did and I think you'll see a focus in the confirmation hearings about what Gates knew. After all, he was the second-ranking man and it is likely he knew, or had access to, a great deal of information.''

The Washington Post reported last week that Gates told his staff the CIA's Inspector General's office was reopening its inquiry into whether CIA covert operations in 1985 and 1986 violated the congressional prohibition then in effect against giving the Contras direct or indirect aid.

He also told CIA employees they would be allowed to revise what they previously told the inspector general on the issue, the newspaper said.

The CIA helped implement the delivery of weapons to Iran. But it was forbidden by the terms of a presidential ``finding'' authorizing the covert operation to inform Congress.

According to a report issued by the committee on Jan. 29, Gates said h and Casey were warned by a CIA analyst early last October that there was a possibility the profits of the Iranian arms sales were being diverted, possibly to the Nicaraguan Contras.

Gates and Casey met Oct. 9 with Marine Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, the principal White House figure in both the arms sale and the diversion.

Gates testified that while North made ``a very cryptic reference to a Swiss account and money for the Contras,' ' he and Casey did not press the matter after North assured them the CIA was ``completely clean'' on the matter.